



CHAMPIONSHIP RACES

THE TIMEFORM VERDICT

CHAMPION HURDLE

HURRICANE FLY	184
ROCK ON RUBY	182
ZARKANDAR	178+
OSCAR WHISKY	178
GRANDOUET	178

Timeform's Verdict

With **Hurricane Fly's** third in this race a year ago put down to a not-quite-so-good day at the office, he's the selection to regain his crown having looked irresistible so far this term. With the end-to-end gallop played out last year unlikely to be repeated this time round, **Rock On Ruby** is passed over in favour of **Zarkandar** for the runner-up spot.

CHAMPION CHASE

SPRINTER SACRE	194p
SIZING EUROPE	183
CUE CARD	180
SANCTUAIRE	177
WISHFULL THINKING	173§

Timeform's Verdict

While the presence of **Cue Card**, **Sizing Europe** and **Mail de Bievre**, all of whom race up with the pace, would certainly ensure a thrilling spectacle, it would also serve to set the race up for the strong-travelling **Sprinter Sacre**, who has looked high on unbeatable this term. **Nicky Henderson's** charge is already the highest-rated jumps horse in training and, as a seven-year-old with only thirteen career-starts to his name, he may still have even more to offer.

GOLD CUP

BOBS WORTH	186p
SIR DES CHAMPS	185+
LONG RUN	184
SILVINIACO CONTI	183+
CAPTAIN CHRIS	179

Timeform's Verdict

Bobs Worth is clearly a worthy favourite but he did have to miss his intended prep run in the **Argento** having been 'not quite right' according to his trainer, in which case it could be wise to back another dual Festival winner in **Sir des Champs** instead, the **Willie Mullins**-trained seven-year-old seemingly crying out for a return to further than three miles. **Long Run** is yet to finish outside of the first three in his twenty-four race career and makes plenty of appeal each-way.

WORLD HURDLE

QUEVEGA	182
OSCAR WHISKY	178
MONKSLAND	174
REVE DE SIVOLA	174x
BOG WARRIOR	173

Timeform's Verdict

With **Big Buck's** absent and **Quevega** reportedly heading for the **Mares' Hurdle** again this looks a great opportunity for **Oscar Whisky**, who proved his stamina for the trip last time. Ground near good would be a slight concern for both **Reve de Sivola** and **Monksland** with the pair having done most of their racing in testing conditions, though the latter's participation is now in doubt following a recent setback. Last year's third **Smad Place** has each-way claims at a big price.

RYANAIR CHASE

SIZING EUROPE	183
CUE CARD	180
RIVERSIDE THEATRE	177
FIRST LIEUTENANT	177
CHINA ROCK	176
ALBERTAS RUN	176

Timeform's Verdict

Even with the prospect of **Sizing Europe** lining up here rather than in the **Champion Chase**, **Cue Card** is still a consistent selection following his win at **Ascot**. **First Lieutenant** is a danger on the figures but he has been campaigned over a fair bit further of late, and therefore it may pay to chance a juicy-priced one each-way, with **For Non Stop** just getting the nod over **Albertas Run** for that role.



THE NOVICE CHASERS

'I said we had a big dark aeroplane in Sprinter Sacre. Maybe we've got a big grey one as well.' Those were Nicky Henderson's words after **Simonsig** had cruised home in the Neptune at last year's Festival, and his charge has certainly taken off since being sent over fences. Not only is odds-on Arkle favourite Simonsig, winner of Grade 2s at Ascot and Kempton six days apart in December, the highest-rated novice chaser running at the Cheltenham Festival judged on Timeform ratings, he still has a 'Large P' attached to his master figure to signify the strong likelihood of further improvement. Quite simply, with his jumping having been razor-sharp so far, it's difficult to envisage defeat for Simonsig.

One who looks a serious contender for the Jewson is **Aupcharlie** (151), who has gone down narrowly in a pair of graded races since making an impressive chasing debut in November. After showing much improved form to finish second to stablemate Back In Focus at Leopardstown, Aupcharlie lost little in defeat when runner-up to Tofino Bay at Naas, simply outstayed by the winner in the very testing conditions over three miles. Aupcharlie's high cruising speed and sound jumping suggest he'll prove at least as effective dropped in trip and he looks well worth backing.

TIMEFORM'S TOP NOVICE CHASERS		
162P	SIMONSIG	<i>Nicky Henderson</i>
160p	DYNASTE	<i>David Pipe</i>
158p	OVERTURN	<i>Donald McCain</i>
155	ARVIKA LIGEONNIERE	<i>Willie Mullins, Ireland</i>
154p	BOSTON BOB	<i>Willie Mullins, Ireland</i>
154+	ROLLING ACES	<i>Paul Nicholls</i>

THE NOVICE HURDLERS

The 'Cheltenham Banker' receives an inordinate amount of air time in the days and weeks before the Festival and turns up in the Supreme inordinately often. Joining Cue Card, Dinguib and Cousin Vinny on the recent list of Supreme bankers is My Tent Or Yours, trained in Britain by Nicky Henderson but sporting the green-and gold colours of Ireland's J.P. McManus. In terms of Timeform figures, **My Tent Or Yours** easily outstrips Cue Card, Dinguib and Cousin Vinny. In fact, his monstrous rating of 168p, achieved when slaughtering a top handicap field in the Betfair Hurdle at Newbury last time, will be the highest ever brought to the Festival by a novice, and My Tent Or Yours would actually hold serious claims in the Champion Hurdle. McManus' hand is strengthened by the presence of **Jezki**, who the businessman purchased privately following his defeat of the owner's **Waaheb** at Leopardstown last time.

TIMEFORM'S TOP NOVICE HURDLERS		
168p	MY TENT OR YOURS	<i>Nicky Henderson</i>
158p	PONT ALEXANDRE	<i>Willie Mullins, Ireland</i>
154p	JEZKI	<i>Mrs J Harrington, Ireland</i>
152	DODGING BULLETS	<i>Paul Nicholls</i>
151p	AT FISHERS CROSS	<i>Rebecca Curtis</i>
151p	RULE THE WORLD	<i>Mouse Morris, Ireland</i>
151p	THE NEW ONE	<i>Nigel Twiston-Davies</i>
151	CAUSE OF CAUSES	<i>Gordon Elliott, Ireland</i>

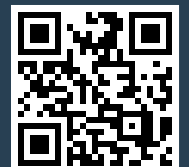


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ASK THE JURY

Jamie Lynch, Daniel Barber and Martin Dixon, all members of Timeform's successful Jury tipping service, give you the lowdown on who they'll be backing at the Festival.



Jamie Lynch
Chief Correspondent



Martin Dixon
Chief Reporter



Dan Barber
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Best of the Shorties?

While the weak keep their powder dry, treading carefully on race one of day one, the strong will be steaming into **My Tent Or Yours** in the Supreme, and rightly so. Yes it will be a big field, and yes he's a short price, and yes he's never run at Cheltenham before, but weigh that up against the fact that he's 14 lb clear—a full stone—on Timeform ratings, and he hardly looked all out at Newbury did he?

It's true that the Supreme Novices' Hurdle has proven a minefield for short-priced favourites in recent years, but the likes of Cousin Vinny (153p), Dinguib (152p) and Cue Card (155p) had achieved nothing like the level of form shown by **My Tent Or Yours** (168p) in his Betfair Hurdle romp. Being involved in that big-field scenario at Newbury can only have helped his development and, barring accidents, I expect him to win easily. Fast-Forward 12 months and it'll be My Tent Or Yours 9/4 fav for the Champion!

Dynaste apparently still has the Jewson as a possible back-up plan, so take advantage of non-runner no bet, but with warmer climes now upon us the likelihood remains that the RSA Chase over three miles—the sort of trip at which he twice gave Big Buck's a scare over hurdles—will be his chosen Festival target. The Pipe stable have some demons to exorcise in this following last year's flop of their 'Great Grey Hope' Grands Crus, and it's possibly those regularly repeated but largely irrelevant comparisons between the pair that are keeping Dynaste at a price which, on form, looks patently too big given his clear superiority on Timeform ratings.

Overhyped?

The Coral Cup always has been and always will be an 8/1 the field race, and therefore **Wonderful Charm** is an offensive price at 5/1 in some places. It seems everybody has jumped on the fact that Nicholls said he was toying with the World Hurdle for him, but his form is nowhere near that level, nor is it even in line with his handicap mark of 149. I know it's the Champion Trainer we're dealing with, but the Coral Cup is a merciless race for a horse like Wonderful Charm who's short on experience and returning from an absence, in which time he's needed a breathing op.

Sir des Champs' strike rate is undoubtedly impressive, but for me he still has plenty to prove as a strong Gold Cup candidate. His Irish form with Flemenstar this season (clear with that rival in both the John Durkan and Irish Hennessy) might not be worth all that it seems, and I was unconvinced by his performance in the Lexus. That's the only time that he's been in a competitive race outside of novice company, and he made mistakes and looked laboured, so I'd have him behind Bobs Worth, Silviniaco Conti and Long Run in the betting.

The World Hurdle field, several of whom have been put up as likely alternatives to Oscar Whisky. The phrase "can't see the wood for the trees" springs to mind; Oscar Whisky is the clear pick on form and, though his weak finish in last year's race is still at the forefront of many minds, he did attempt to eyeball the imperious Big Buck's on that occasion, while, most crucially of all, his second to Reve de Sivola in the Cleeve on Trials Day (when ridden too conservatively) surely put to bed any lasting stamina doubts.

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Longshot?</p>	<p>If 16/1 fits into the 'longshot' category, and it does in my cautious book, then Regal Encore in the bumper would be my suggestion. Two wins from two starts, including one of the best bumper performances of the season at Chepstow, don't quite tell the full story for Regal Encore, who both times went from last to first on the bridle. If he was with a higher-profile trainer than Anthony Honeyball, Regal Encore might be nearer favourite, but his owner may yet step in, a certain J. P. McManus having bought him prior to Chepstow.</p>	<p>I'd never have envisaged putting this horse up for any race in previous seasons, even as a longshot, as Rose of The Moon was a thoroughly dislikeable hurdler for Milton Harris and David Pipe. A switch to the ever-impressive David O'Meara has done the trick, however, and he bolted up on his first two starts over fences this season. Fair enough, there isn't great depth to either of those pieces of form, but he travelled strongly and jumped well on both occasions and there's a genuine excuse for his flop at Newbury when last seen (race came too soon after just eight days off).</p>	<p>Even with a fine record fresh, on goodish ground and at Cheltenham, it's asking a lot to be confident about Albertas Run reclaiming his Ryanair crown (won race in 2010 and 2011) having failed to make the track all season. However, there's real uncertainty regarding the participation of several ahead of him in the betting and, at current odds of 16/1 and bigger, it's worth risking him in his bid to make up for his gallant defeat twelve months ago.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Handicap Blot?</p>	<p>No points for Ballynagour, the biggest blot of all, and probably not many points for Our Mick either, but the case for him from a handicapping perspective is compelling in the JLT. Third in the race last year as a novice, Our Mick is only 1 lb higher this time around, when the handicapper could and would have raised him significantly had he come down two out rather than three out at Cheltenham on his reappearance, still upsides Katenko at the time.</p>	<p>Pendra would have been an even bigger 'blot' but for finishing second in the Tolworth, but at the same time that effort underlined what a progressive novice he is and a mark of 139 for the Coral Cup is lenient. A step up in trip looks certain to suit judging by his pedigree (by Old Vic out of a useful mare who stayed 3m) and any further improvement should see him go very close. If he was trained by Nicholls or Henderson then I suspect he'd be close to favourite, so at a best-priced 14/1 he's just about my 'nap' of the week.</p>	<p>Attaglance provided half of one of the great stories from last season's Festival by joining stablemate Cape Tribulation in sending a major handicap prize back to Malcolm Jefferson's Malton base. While the latter is considered a live outsider by some for the Gold Cup, it is Attaglance who has much more compelling claims of notching successive Cheltenham wins in his likely target (Pulteney Land Investments Novices' Handicap Chase), his latest effort at Musselburgh not only qualifying him for a considerably lower chase mark but also providing compelling evidence that the horse jumps well enough to translate his useful hurdles form to fences.</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Specials?</p>	<p>Henderson has three, Mullins has at least one, but Nicholls doesn't have any. We're talking bankers. Nicholls has got chances, good chances, and lots of them, but none that you'd regard as certainties. It might sound inconceivable that Nicholls won't train a winner but think back to last year when he had just the two, namely Big Buck's, who's not around this time, and Rock On Ruby, trained now – and seemingly then – by Harry Fry. It's no slight on the Champion Trainer, who's suffered bad luck this season with several sidelined stars, but 12/1 looks a big price to me about Nicholls drawing a blank.</p>	<p>I'll be honest, these types of bet aren't really for me, but the 7/4 on offer about the World Hurdle producing the tightest finish of the four Championship races looks reasonable. Sprinter Sacre will hack up in the Queen Mother, while I suspect they'll end up quite well strung out in the Gold Cup. The World Hurdle is an open race and I can see them finishing in a heap.</p>	<p>It says plenty for the current Nicholls/Henderson/Mullins domination that there's a "Without The Big Three" market, something usually reserved for football teams in the Premier League. David Pipe seems set for a bold showing, but it is Jonjo O'Neill who makes more appeal at twice the odds, with the aforementioned veteran Albertas Run joined by the likes of Taquin de Seuil, Shutthefrontdoor, Alfie Sherrin, Merry King and Tominator amongst a hatful of Festival entries.</p>